



# MEXICAN WOLF RECOVERY PROGRAM PROJECT UPDATE

April - July 15, 1999

## Purpose of this Update

This update provides the interested public with current information about the Mexican Wolf Recovery Program.

## Reintroduction Program

As of July 15, there are 22 Mexican gray wolves in five family groups free-ranging the Apache National Forest. This year we released only two sub-adult pack members, which allowed us to focus our management efforts on bonded pairs with the potential to produce wild-born pups. Four of the five potential breeding pairs released this year produced pups successfully — one pack in captivity, two in pre-release pens, and one in the wild.

A review of the Mexican Wolf Recovery Program's first year was held in Albuquerque, New Mexico on January 11. Program staff and cooperators met with other wolf recovery experts, including biologists, law enforcement agents, and outreach specialists. Many issues and ideas were discussed, but the following concepts prevailed:

- ❑ Perseverance is the key to endangered species recovery.
- ❑ Information and education programs should focus on the hunting community to alert hunters to the presence of wolves and to educate hunters about proper identification of wolves and distinction from coyotes in the field.
- ❑ The program should develop methods and strategies to facilitate releasing wolves in more remote locations to minimize wolf/human interactions.
- ❑ Increased supplemental feeding of initially released wolves may be necessary to enhance pup survival during the transition from captivity to the wild.



We incorporated all of these ideas into our 1999 strategy for wolf release and management techniques. For example, to facilitate soft releases in remote locations, an experimental pen design, using heavy-gauge, soft nylon mesh and steel posts instead of standard chain link, was developed. The materials used are relatively lightweight and low-impact; can be erected and removed quickly from remote locations; and can be transported on pack stock, if necessary. To discourage wolves from chewing out of this pen, electric wire (delivering a mild shock) can be woven into the mesh.

The Campbell Blue (CB) pair has been free ranging without supplemental feeding since their December 1998 pairing. Their remote location makes intensive monitoring difficult, therefore backcountry monitoring was conducted in June to determine if the pair had pups and to collect data on the pair's food habits. There was no sign of pups, but prey carcasses indicated the pair were hunting on their own (see *Wolf/Prey Interactions*). M166 was one of the original wolves released in March 1998, being held captive for only about three weeks out of the last 16 months.

Three members of the original five-member Gavilan Pack (GV) (initially named Strayhorse Pack) were placed in a soft mesh pen reinforced with electric wire at Coalson Canyon in March after fighting with the CB pair through the fence of the Engineer Springs pen in February. Around April 7, GV F168 gave birth to five pups (four males, one female). Many wolves gave birth earlier than expected this year, possibly due to the mild winter. Extremely dry conditions caused livestock to concentrate in the area where the GV pack was to be released. On May 21 the pack was captured and transported by helicopter to a temporary mesh pen in Horse Canyon where there would be less potential for livestock interactions and conflict. The pack self-released from the pen within 24 hours, and has remained in the release area where it is being fed supplementally.

The Mule Pack (MP) F189 delivered four pups (three males, one female) on April 5 or 6 at the captive management facility at Sevilleta National Wildlife Refuge (NWR). This is one month earlier than her 1997 delivery date. The mated pair and their four six-week-old pups were transported to Alpine, Arizona on May 22. High winds precluded transfer by helicopter that same day and the pack was held overnight in crates. Early the following morning the MP Pack was airlifted by helicopter to a landing site just outside the Blue Range Primitive Area (BRPA). From there the pack was transported in specially designed panniers on pack mules to a temporary mesh pen in Rousensock Canyon within the BRPA. The MP Pack was the first group of wolves, to our knowledge, ever transported in this manner. The pack self-released from its pen within 24 hours and remain in release area where it is being supplementally fed.

On May 13, the Hawks Nest (HN) F486 gave birth to three pups (sexes unknown). The pair and its pups were released June 3 with the confirmation of elk calving in the area. The

pack remains near the release pen and is being fed supplementally. M131 is the only known surviving member of the original HN pack released March 1998. He was recaptured and paired with F486 from Ladder Ranch in December 1998. The pair split three days after their release. Recaptured in January 1999, they were held in the CB pen to facilitate bonding and whelping.

The Pipestem Pack (PS) has been free-ranging since March 15. By the end of April, the pack localized near the pen, indicating possible denning and tending pups. A closure around the possible den site was established May 10. Pup presence was confirmed on June 18 by sign in the den drainage. This is the second positive confirmation of Mexican wolf pups born in the wild since inception of the project in March 1998. The first visual confirmation of a PS wild-born pup was on July 10. The number of pups is still undetermined. The pack's movements were concentrated near their release pen until April 1 when members began extending their movements to a ranch about seven miles north of the pen. Several interactions with ranch dogs and livestock occurred during this reporting period (see *Wolf/Livestock and Wolf/Pet Interactions*). The PS pack is responsible for the first confirmed killing of livestock on July 11. Recapture efforts began July 12. The male and yearling were captured July 13 and returned to Sevilleta NWR. Efforts continue to recapture the female and the 1999 wild-born pups, as they too will be returned to Sevilleta until a suitable site is identified for the pack's relocation.

Night monitoring of all five packs has been implemented during the hot summer months, when wolves are sedentary during daylight hours. It was determined that the majority of the wolves' movements were indeed occurring between dusk and dawn.

#### **Closures**

Forest closures of approximately one-mile

radius are established during the time that wolves occupy acclimation pens, and also may be in effect around den sites when necessary. Closures currently in effect are the PS Pack den site in the Turkey Creek area and at the Hawks Nest Pack den site near the Campbell Blue pen (see map).

### **Wolf/Prey Interactions**

One pack has been self-sufficient during this reporting period. Since April 1, biologists have investigated seven prey items fed upon by wolves. Three were elk: two adults and one undetermined. Two were white-tailed deer: an adult and a fawn. One was a mule deer of undetermined age. One was an unidentifiable deer species of undetermined age. Of the seven prey items, none were confirmed wolf kills, six were possible kills, and one was a scavenged hunter kill.

### **Wolf/Human Interactions**

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Forensics laboratory completed a necropsy on PS f563 found dead by a passing motorist along Highway 191 on March 21. The findings indicated that the wolf died from injuries sustained from a collision/impact with a solid structure, such as a vehicle.

### **Wolf/Livestock and Wolf/Pet Interactions**

The first confirmed killing of livestock by wolves occurred during this reporting period. All wolves were located within allotments containing livestock, including cows with calves present. The following interactions were documented:

- PS Pack interacted with ranch dogs on 4/1, 5/14, 5/19 and 6/26 without incident. On 4/4 a dog was injured and treated. Defenders of Wildlife offered the rancher reimbursement for veterinary costs. On 6/9 a dog suffered a minor bite wound.
- PS Pack observed near ranch without incident: 4/22, 5/20, 5/31, 6/3, 6/4.

- PS Pack interacted with livestock without incident: 5/14, 5/19, 5/31, 6/20, 6/25.
- Reports of possible wolf depredation within PS Pack territory occurred 4/4, 6/14-17, 6/22, 6/24, 6/26, 6/28, 6/30. The 6/22 attack on a calf was consistent with a wolf attack. The calf was treated and survived. Defenders of Wildlife offered the rancher reimbursement for veterinary costs. The 6/24 depredation was a confirmed mountain lion kill (losses to predators other than wolves are adjusted through ranchers' grazing fees on public lands). The 6/30 depredation was intervened by project staff. The calf was injured slightly and survived. Defenders of Wildlife offered full-market value for one cow and two calves. The other four incidences are awaiting investigation reports from USDA Wildlife Services.
- The first confirmed killing of livestock by wolves occurred on 7/11 within the PS Pack's territory. This initiated recapture efforts. Defenders of Wildlife offered the rancher full-market value of the loss.

### **Interagency Coordination**

The USFS continues to provide valuable support and technical assistance for the wolf project. The Service's Pinetop Fisheries Resources Office also provides administrative and technical support and assistance with local outreach activities.

The sixth and seventh meetings of the Interagency Management Advisory Group (IMAG) were held in Clifton (March 30) and Alpine, Arizona (July 13). After the March 30 meeting, wolf program staff from all cooperating agencies conducted public meetings in Clifton (March 30) and Safford (March 31). About 70 people attended.

USFS staff hosted two meetings on March 31: one between wolf program staff and

grazing permittees on the Clifton district (25 people); another between wolf program staff and community leaders from Safford (20 people).

USFS Fire Management Specialists from the Alpine and Clifton Districts provided basic fire behavior and safety training for wolf project field staff on April 16 in Alpine.

### **Outreach**

- ' The Mexican Wolf Interagency Reporting Hotline, **1-888-459-WOLF (9653)**, is operational to report sightings, harassment, or taking of Mexican wolves, or to report livestock depredation.
- ' Field updates are provided approximately every two weeks on the USFWS Mexican wolf web page <http://ifw2es.fws.gov/mexicanwolf>
- ' One-page updates for local Arizona residents in Alpine, Springerville, and Clifton are posted regularly in various public places, such as post offices, libraries, and USFS offices.
- ' Large signs providing information on wolf reintroduction and recommendations to minimize wolf/human conflicts are posted at strategic locations throughout the Apache National Forest.

Project staff hosted a Mexican wolf booth June 4-5 at the Gila National Wilderness 75th Anniversary sponsored by the USFS and several local organizations in Silver City and Glenwood, NM. A highlight was keynote speaker Nina Leopold Bradley, daughter of Aldo Leopold, who spoke about the importance of wilderness and the excitement that the family felt about the return of wolves to the area.

Project staff conducted field trips and gave a presentation June 8 for the USFS Wilderness Rendezvous on the Apache National Forest.

Project staff made numerous presentations to educational institutions, civic groups, and non-profit organizations and conducted many media interviews.

### **Non-Government Partnership Activities**

A total of 40 facilities (29 in the U.S. and 11 in Mexico) participate in the Mexican wolf captive-breeding program. The Ladder Ranch and Sevilleta NWR, both in New Mexico, and Wolf Haven International in Washington manage Mexican wolves for pre-acclimation release purposes. All cooperating captive management facilities manage Mexican wolves at their own cost.

The Defenders of Wildlife continues to offer reimbursement to ranchers for confirmed losses of livestock. The organization is also sponsoring a student intern biologist from Mexico (see *Personnel*).

Ladder Ranch hosted an animal capture and handling clinic for Mexican wolf staff on June 1-2. Turner Enterprises veterinarian Dave Hunter taught the workshop.

Wild Sentry conducted 12 southwest educational programs during February 19 through March 4 throughout southeastern Arizona and southwestern New Mexico, reaching 2,885 people. Defenders of Wildlife provided major funding for the educational tour.

### **Captive Population Update**

There are currently 185 Mexican wolves in the captive population. There were 31 breeding pairs in place for the 1999 breeding season. Seven of these are potential release candidate pairs. The captive population produced 29 surviving pups in 1999.

During this reporting period, nine breeding pairs and at least 14 pups of the captive population were in pre-acclimation facilities.

One breeding pair and its four pups were transferred to the wild. Two free-ranging wolves were returned to captivity for management reasons.

This is the first year that release candidates Ghost Ranch/McBride M484 x McBride F518 produced pups. Five born; four survived.

### **Litigation**

The lawsuit against the Mexican wolf reintroduction project titled New Mexico Cattle Growers' Association, et al. v. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, et al., CV 98-367 (D.N.M.) remains active. Final pleadings on the Plaintiffs' motion for a preliminary injunction were filed with the Court on April 22. The next step is for the Court to schedule a hearing on the injunction motion. As of July 15, no hearing date had been set.

The Court has established a briefing schedule. The Plaintiffs' (NM Cattle Growers' Association, et. al) Opening Brief on the Merits is due on July 19, the Defendants' (Bruce Babbitt, et. al) Response Brief is due on September 6, and the Plaintiffs' Reply Brief is due on September 24. The Court will then review both side's arguments and the government's administrative record and decide the case. This process is expected to take several months.

### **Personnel**

- ' Peter Brown, from Montana, began work as a field team volunteer.
- ' Todd Schipper joined the field staff as a summer intern.
- ' Nahom Sanchez, a graduate student in biology from Mexico, joined the project as a USFWS summer intern through a Defenders of Wildlife sponsorship.

### **Life in Wolf Country**

We encourage individuals living within or near the wolf recovery area to share their

experiences and insights with other readers. We hope that this will foster open discussion of important issues and concerns of local residents.

The guidelines for your article:

' Be respectful of others and their views

' Keep it 250 words or less in length

We will publish your article verbatim, unless it deviates from the guidelines. If we must edit your article, we will do our best to retain its original intent.

This update reaches over 3,000 people throughout the United States and several foreign countries who have expressed an interest in remaining informed about the Mexican Wolf Recovery Program. This is your chance to share useful information, voice your opinion and ideas, stimulate debate, or make suggestions to project managers.

*Please submit your articles to either of the two addresses below by **September 15, 1999**.*  
We look forward to hearing from you.

### **Information Materials**

Informational materials are available through our web site <http://ifw2es.fws.gov/mexicanwolf> or contact us at the addresses below. We welcome your ideas about our written communications, our general outreach efforts, and any specific suggestions you have about how to improve the *Project Update*.

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